

Vive Emmanuel!

French President Emmanuel Macron is the new superstar in global politics. Two years ago, he was known only to insiders as the young Minister for Economics, Industrial and Digital Affairs, in the socialistic government of President François Hollande, a Master of Sciences Po and trained at ENA with the who's who of French politics. Ten years ago, he joined Investment Bank Rothschild, became a partner and was involved in the USD 11.9 billion takeover of baby food division of Pfizer, by Nestle.

In 2016, still a Minister, he started a campaign called 'En Marche' or 'marching ahead' and formed an independent party. As an independent candidate, he announced to run for Presidency in 2017, without any of the known parties backing him. Some 16,000 young enthusiastic supporters, the frustration of the French people with the established parties of socialists and conservatives and the angst of a right-wing nationalistic anti-European movement taking over, swept him into office with a vast majority. He then even managed to position his own party and get a majority in Parliament, just one month after taking office. This would be as if in India or Germany, BJP and Congress or the conservative CDU CSU and the Social Democratic SPD got wiped out and the Prime Minister or Chancellor popped out from the middle of nowhere.

Start-up Macron left no stone unturned and in his first year in office, initiated reforms in almost all the sectors of the French society that were, or are considered hot potatoes, like religion, tax, labour, Parliament or retirement benefits of the railways or the aviation industry. Some of his reforms or measures may look like copies from Germany, similar to the Agenda 2010 of Chancellor Schroeder or the dialogue with the people from Chancellor Merkel. But the energy and the speed with which he is going ahead can be only compared to Angela Merkel's crisis management during the Euro crisis, the financial crisis, the refugee crisis or the Ukraine crisis, with a difference that this was happening for over more than a decade and not restricted to Germany.

Apart from the breathtaking speed and his confidence, he flabbergasts his counterparts and audiences with intelligence and knowledge of politics, history and literature. The opening speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair, where France was the partner-country, was an absolute delight, focusing on the finest of German and French literature, philosophy and history. And no wonder he wrote his master's thesis on Machiavelli and Hegel.

With his almost boy's charm and a good instinct to turn people around his finger, he treated President Donald Trump and his wife Melania like the King and Queen of America, at the 14th of July French National Day parade and thus was invited with his wife to the US, and treated equally like the King and Queen of France. He grabbed the opportunity to speak in Congress to President Trump, the congressmen, the senators, American VIPs and the people of America the truth and nothing but the truth. Even though he spoke in English, it seems President Trump has either not understood what he was saying or it just didn't register. Its difference with the working-lunch that Chancellor Merkel had with President Trump the next day could not have been more symbolic, but it is also typical for the different situations the French President and the Chancellor are in.

As the independent newcomer, everybody tries to pull Macron on their side and he, as the 'new kid on the block' can make full use of being a 'clean slate' that can start afresh. Even during his state visit to India in March, he traveled with a more than 100-member political and business delegation and signed up a good dozen of agreements with Prime Minister Modi, with the press all over. Compared to this, the visit of German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier a fortnight later, was a rather modest affair.

Fact of the matter is that with USD 10 billion, the trade between France and India is not even close to half of that between Germany and India and like with the US, where the trade stands at USD 171 billion with a surplus of USD 60 billion in favor of Germany, with France it is not even half and a surplus of just USD 15 billion. With a GDP of about USD 3.7 trillion, Germany is way ahead of France with little less than USD 2.6 trillion and thus it is critical for Macron to do some more marketing, especially since the economic growth falls even behind that of Germany. So it may not come as a surprise that the difference between a Marching Macron and

a hesitant Merkel who has pretty much seen it all, is like that between a young sprinter and a seasoned long-distance runner. Macron has it all ahead, whereas Merkel has it all behind.

The challenges though, are the same, especially when it comes to Europe and the crises in the rest of the world. And now it becomes interesting. In his acceptance speech at the Karls Prize Award ceremony in April in Aachen, President Macron pointed out what he had already mentioned in his visionary speech at the Sorbonne University a year ago, that besides the reforms in our own countries, we need substantial reforms in Europe. As the elections for the European Parliament come up next year, with his next big project, En Marche Europe, Mr. Macron touches the sensitivities of the un-united United Europe. Everybody knows that one cannot be half pregnant and with the US playing US first, China playing China first, Russia playing Putin first, EU partner UK playing England Alone, and even India and smaller players like Turkey playing India and Turkey first, it has to be Europe first and not Germany first and France first, since as relatively small countries with shrinking population and stagnating growth rates, they could find themselves alone and last before they know it.

If there is one team in Europe that could do the trick, then it is MM – Merkel and Macron. Both are partners by reality and Mrs. Merkel is even a year younger than Macron's partner by choice – his wife, Brigitte. The challenges are huge, but there are no alternatives. The house of Europe, 65 years after the Treaty of Élysée that formed the basis for a peaceful future between Germany and France after two World Wars, 61 years after the Treaty of Rome and the foundation of the European Economic Union EWG, 45 years after the joining of the UK, Ireland and Denmark and 25 years after the Treaty of Maastricht, the EU needs some renovation. Everybody loves freedom, everybody loves safety and protection, but when it comes to money and who I am allowed to invite in my home, the friendship stops. To look beyond one's doorstep and see the greater good, is a question of education and affordability. Like with Brexit, where the people in the rural areas were made to believe with the help of fake news, that they were cheated by the people in the metros, the people in the Eastern part of the EU are made to believe that they're losing their identity in an anonymous Europe that is making decisions on their behalf, which they cannot influence.

It was more than symbolic when Chancellor Merkel received President Macron in Berlin, at the first German-French summit after her re-appointment, in front of the construction site of the Humboldt Forum. The most discussed replica of the residence of the Prussian Kings and the German Emperors, after the abduction of William II 100 years ago and more than 400 years of royal occupation, was first turned into a museum and then badly damaged at the end of World War II and later fully destroyed by the communist East German government. What some interpret as the symbol for lost German imperial glory is rather going to be a symbol for peaceful globalization that Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt practiced in the 18th and 19th centuries, with touring the world and collecting artifacts symbolizing far-away cultures, arts, spices and fauna and being real global and European citizens.

So when at a time with no cars, planes, phones or internet, people could be European and even world-citizens, why should it not be possible today? Compared to Germany's first Chancellor, 87-year old Konrad Adenauer, Mrs. Merkel still has 23 years to go. But for Emmanuel Macron the limit is clear. In France, the President has a 5-year tenure and can be re-elected only once. So for him, it is over when he is 49 years young. Then he will be exactly 30 years younger than President Charles d'Gaulle, when he relinquished office. It is therefore better understandable why Emmanuel Macron is pushing the European agenda more than Chancellor Merkel. What will he do in 2027? 2029 are elections for the European Parliament and the EU Commission will need a new President.

Emmanuel means 'God is with us' and in the old Testament, it was the name of the Messiah, who as prophesied by Isaiah, would come as Jesus Christ. And Macron is the mark placed over a vowel, to indicate the vowel is long and needs a special pronunciation. So what more confidence does one need than a Messiah with a special long pronunciation, to lead Europe and maybe the world?